

THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

for Teens

DISCOVERING GOD'S
PLAN FOR LOVE AND LIFE



PARENT'S GUIDE

THEOLOGY
OF THE BODY
for Teens

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Chapter One

Created for Love

Can you imagine a world in which there was no divorce, sexual abuse, depression, sexually-transmitted diseases, eating disorders, addictions, cheating, or unwed pregnancies?

It seems unimaginable, doesn't it? But if we all long for such a world, why do we live in such a different one? If we were made for love, why does it seem that authentic love is so hard to find? And if we want love, why do we so often settle for its counterfeits? The twelve chapters in the *Theology of the Body for Teens* curriculum set out to answer these questions for your teenager.

In the first chapter, "Created for Love," we set out to open the minds and hearts of the students to the fact that God, who is love, created them out of love and calls them to love. To explore this subject, we delve into the following points:

- God designed us for union with Him and with others.
- Our bodies have been created by God and are good.
- Our bodies reveal deep truths about the meaning of life.
- Through our bodies, we make visible the love of God.

Learning and Experiencing the Love We Deserve

These topics are profound, but the aim of this curriculum is not mere intellectual knowledge. Rather, the purpose of this program is to urge our teenagers to examine their lives by looking at their deepest yearning, the need for love. God placed this desire within all of us so that it would actually lead us back to Him.

Unfortunately, because of the effects of original sin, love is often confused with lust, which is the selfish desire to *use* another person. While original sin may sound like a foggy theological concept, teens easily grasp the “fall of man” when they consider its effects. Some teens have shared:

- “I hooked up with him because I thought it would make him like me more. But the next day, he acted like he hardly knew me.”
- “My parents got divorced when I was four, so I never really had a dad. Now my mom is with this other guy, but they fight a lot.”
- “I’ve been hooked on pornography for years and I don’t know how to stop looking at the stuff.”
- “No one has ever seemed interested in me. I hate my body.”
- “You always hear about the guys using the girls, but after I gave my virginity to my girlfriend, I found out she was cheating on me.”

“Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not intimately participate in it.”

- Pope John Paul II

Such tragic testimonies are more common in the lives of teenagers than most adults would like to admit. The fact is, though, that most high school students have struggled in at least one of these areas. But no matter how wounded or innocent a teenager may be, deep within the heart of every one of them is the desire for a love that is true, good, and beautiful. Unfortunately, because of the influence of media and the modern culture, many teens feel lost at sea when it comes to finding love and meaning in their lives. I have found that when Catholics—young and old alike—find out that such confusion and pain was not how it was “in the beginning,” they begin to have hope that answers to their heart’s longings are possible.

*“Life is not worth
living unless it is
lived for others.”*

*- Blessed Teresa
of Calcutta*

“In the Beginning, It Was Not So”

When God created us, He made us in His image and likeness. We may have heard that phrase of Jesus (“In the beginning, it was not so”) often but may have not considered what it really means for our lives. The Bible says “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). When love is present, it is never in isolation. This is why a person cannot marry himself. Rather, love requires three things: a lover, a beloved, and the love between them. There must be a communion of persons, united in love. So, in the case of God, we have the Father, the Son, and the fire of love between them, the Holy Spirit.

In making us male and female, God designed us to reflect his life-giving love by becoming a sincere gift to one another. Especially through the union of spouses in marriage, a husband and wife make visible to the world the invisible reality of God—that He is love. But no matter what a person’s state in life (married, single, or religious), everyone is able to make a gift of himself or herself. For this reason, Pope John Paul

II recalled the words of Vatican II, which said, “Man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere gift of self.”²

This calling to make a gift of ourselves is stamped into our bodies. In our complementarity as male and female, God has stamped into our design a call to give ourselves to another. A man's body does not make sense by itself, nor does a woman's body. They make sense in light of the other. This is a key concept that underpins Pope John Paul II's landmark work known as the Theology of the Body. Simply put, the body is a key to understanding the very meaning of our lives.



Questions for Your Teen

1. How can I love you better?
2. How can you love others in your life in an authentic way?
3. Do you believe that God loves you?
4. What do you think of the idea that the male body only makes sense in light of a woman's body?

FAMILY APPLICATIONS

1. For every child, the love of God is first made visible through the love of a father and mother. When a child's parents are generous, merciful, patient, affectionate, and present, that child or teenager will be much more able to conceive of a God who possesses the same attributes.
2. The best thing a husband can do for his children is to love his wife. The same could be said of the wife loving her husband. A teenager may read about love in this curriculum, but the true school of love is the family. A teenage girl once said to me that the example of her father sets the standard for all other guys. One night he said to her, "Maggie, I hope one day you'll find a man that loves you as much as I love your mother." Understandably, this made quite an impression on her. Even if you are raising your son or daughter without the other parent, you are sharing a life-giving love with your children through the sacrifices you make for them on a daily basis.
3. The nature of God as a loving union of persons is much easier to grasp when one's own family resembles this. What things could be done within your family to deepen the unity between its members? Perhaps it means turning the TV off during dinner or praying more often as a family. Whatever the case may be, do not be afraid to introduce new traditions in your family that will strengthen its bond for years to come.



SAMPLE



Chapter Two

Love Defined: Giving versus Using

In the first chapter, we invite teens to consider that they have been created for love. Such a concept is easily grasped by the young, who long for acceptance and affirmation. No teen doubts that his or her deepest desire is love.

Confusion arises, however, when it comes to the meaning of love. When a high school student meets with friends at the movie theater, it will only be a matter of time before a “love” story unfolds before them on the screen. Unfortunately, such portrayals of love usually amount to nothing more than infatuation, lust, or both.

While a parent may want to counteract such negative messages, how can anyone compete with multimillion dollar movies, countless commercials, pop-up ads, and airbrushed billboards? The same teenager who listens to hours of music a day on his ipod seems to have a six-second attention span when his parents are talking to him. How do we break through?

The Power of Love

Only one thing is powerful enough to expose the counterfeits of love ... and that is love itself. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy surveyed teenagers, asking them to identify the number

one factor that shapes the decisions they make about their sexuality.³ Was it their peers? Their music? Their siblings? Parents suspected that it was the friends. However, according to the teenagers themselves, the most influential thing that affected the decisions they made regarding sexuality was their parents. Therefore, do not underestimate your ability to reach your teen.

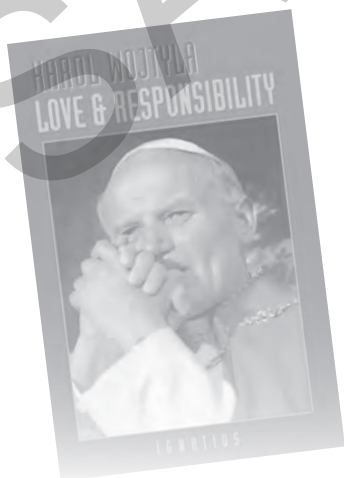
In *Theology of the Body for Teens*, we set out to remind the teenagers of the essence of true love. Thankfully, God has already stamped a desire for it within them. Our job is to remind them of what they already know.

So, what is love? Perhaps Pope John Paul II defined it best when he wrote, “For love is not merely a feeling; it is an act of the will that consists of preferring, in a constant manner, the good of others to the good of one’s self.”⁴ Teens can perceive the difference between this kind of love, and its counterfeit, which is lust. Whereas love is self-giving, lust involves using another for one’s own pleasure.

While emotion, desire, and attraction all play a role in love, they are all too often confused with love itself. Teens often believe that the stronger their

emotions are towards another, the more real love there is. However, Pope John Paul II clarifies the matter for us, saying, “The greater the feeling of responsibility for the person the more true love there is.”⁵

Once a person understands the meaning of love, he or she can apply that information in his or her relationships. By doing so, the concept of chastity begins to make sense.



Redeeming Chastity

Usually when teens hear the term “chastity,” what comes to their minds? Odds are it is the word “NO!” Here is how your son or daughter might imagine a typical conversation between a student and a religion teacher.

Student: Is it OK for my girlfriend and me to ...

Teacher: NO.

Student: Well, what if we just ...

Teacher: NO.

Student: But what if we really ...

Teacher: NO. NO. NO. Just don’t. Be good boys and girls. Hold hands and go to a pumpkin patch together, then play board games with her family, and be home by 7:00 p.m. Otherwise you’ll get her pregnant and die of an STD. Class dismissed. Have a fun weekend!

While this is *not* a fair picture of religion teachers, it *is* a fair representation of the way many teens *view* the concept of chastity. With such negative ideas associated with the word, it is understandable why Pope John Paul II said that the word “chastity” needs to be rehabilitated.

If people understood the true purpose of chastity, they would see that it has nothing to do with fear or prudishness. Nor is it a repression of sexual desires. Rather, chastity is an exercise of the will to choose what is good. It is a refusal to allow the desire for pleasure to displace the call to love. Pleasure is not a bad thing, but when a person pursues enjoyment at the expense of another, love is abandoned.

This is why John Paul II tells us that chastity can only be thought of in association with love. When love is present, the man and woman have

*“Lust is a weak,
poor, whimpering,
whispering thing
when compared
with that richness
and energy of desire
which will arise
when lust has been
killed.”*

- C.S. Lewis

a sincere desire to do what is good for the other. Therefore, when it comes to teenage dating relationships, chastity frees the couple from using each other as objects, and thus makes them capable of authentic love.

When lust takes precedence over love, pleasure becomes one's goal and the other person becomes only a means to it. To such a person, chastity is seen as an obstacle. It serves no purpose but to threaten his or her lifestyle. But we should not be afraid

of the demands of love. If teens can see the beauty of God's plan for human love, they will desire it. They will not choose His ways out of fear of pregnancy or STDs, but rather because God's plan for love is everything that the human heart longs for.

Within every person is a battle between love and lust. As one husband said, “Winning this battle takes faith in Christ, dedication, commitment, honesty with ourselves and others, and a willingness to make sacrifices and deny our own selfish desires. But love is not afraid of those things; love is those things.”⁶ Once we understand this, we will be able to understand why Pope John Paul II said that “only the chaste man and the chaste woman are capable of true love.”⁷



Questions for Your Teen

1. What was the last movie you saw that portrayed true, sacrificial love?
2. What do most of your classmates think love is?
3. What do you think is the meaning of love?
4. Does the idea of living a chaste life challenge you, interest you, scare you?



FAMILY APPLICATIONS

1. Consider ways that you can teach your teenager the meaning of love without using words. For example, through listening well, practicing small acts of thoughtfulness, attending sports games, etc. Don't be discouraged if your teen fails to notice your efforts. The cumulative force of years of love will have a lasting impact.
2. Tell your son or daughter that you love them (daily).
3. Be affectionate to your teens, even if they squirm. The value of a simple human touch is too easily forgotten. In fact, teens today are starved for affection, and they often seek out physical relationships in order to meet their emotional needs. By being affectionate to them, you provide a small antidote to counteract the allure of empty physical relationships.
4. Persevere in the virtue of love at home. When a teen witnesses his parents practicing years of patience, tenderness, and faithfulness, a teen will easily grasp the meaning of love. Lust and infatuation will be seen for what they are: counterfeits.
5. Consider the practice of pointing out images of “love” and “lust” that appear in everyday media that accidentally interrupt your family life.

